

Feature

Development

# Environment, Poverty and Development in Asia

**N**ATURAL events cause losses of lives, limbs and resources and thus become disasters for the humanity. The Asian countries face various kinds of natural disasters. During the 1970s, twice as many people suffered each year from natural disasters compared to the period of the 1960s globally. Some 18.5 million people were affected by drought annually in 1960s, 24.4 million in the 1970s. There were 5.2 million flood victims yearly in the 1960, 15.4 million in the 1970s.

Bangladesh is a country which faces natural calamities very frequently. The natural calamities faced by the people of the country, are floods, cyclones, droughts, river erosion etc. The flood of 1988 was the worst in the history of the country. It affected 360 out of 468 upazilas of the country.

Bangladesh also faces many severe cyclones and tornadoes: 55 cyclones of various intensities hit Bangladesh since the beginning of the twentieth century. In October 1737 the country faced the earliest recorded severe cyclone. It took a toll of 300,000 lives. In October 1876 another catastrophic cyclone occurred in Bakerganj killing 215,000 people. In November 1970 the most dangerous and disastrous cyclone, according to the official statistics, claimed 300,000 people. But many people believe that the actual number of deaths could be from 500,000 to 1,000,000. A severe tornado hit Manikgonj in April 1989. Another severe cyclonic storm occurred recently in April 1991. More than 138,000 people were killed by the cyclone. The total damage of the infrastructure is estimated at US\$1.5 billion.

### Deforestation

Deforestation is the transformation of the forest land to non-forest usage. Degradation is the reduction of the extent and quality of the forest cover.

More than 11 million hectare of tropical forests are destroyed per year and thus over 30 years, would amount to an area about the size of India. According to FAO estimation in the Asia-Pacific region during 1981-85 about 1.826 million ha. of forest area was deforested per year. Average annual rate of deforestation of closest forests in the region is 0.6 per cent. Analysis of the rates of deforestation by country shows that Indonesia leads all others with a mean annual deforestation over half a million ha.; Thailand is next with 333,000 ha. The range is between 100,000 and 250,000 ha. for Malaysia, India, Laos, Philippines and Myanmar. The least affected countries in absolute terms are Bhutan (2,000 ha), Pakistan (7,000 ha).

Deforestation and degradation of forest resources adversely affect land, water resources, ecology and the environment. As a result of deforestation soils become impoverished, loss water holding capacity and possibility of occurrence of floods and droughts increases. When the forests in the catchment areas of the

rivers are cleared, silt-laden rivers with their capacity for providing irrigation water is seriously impaired. For example, in Asia, the Yellow River of China sweeps way 1.6 billion tons of soil into the Bay of Bengal, and the Brahmaputra carries 726 million tons of silt each year, and the Indus River was laden with 435 million tons of soil. In India the rate of land degradation and the depletion of water table are alarming. In Pakistan and the Republic of China deforestation is blamed for the siltation of reservoirs and dams and for causing floods. In Nepal and Pakistan soil erosion led to declining crop yield, fuel and fodder shortages. As a result of deforestation the carbon cycle of the biosphere is affected. Global and regional weather pattern may be changed due to deforestation, when forests are removed the habitat of wild life is endangered. Deforestation brings bad consequences for indigenous forest communities in terms of loss of their source of food, medicine and various services they get from the forests.

### Poor and Deforestation

In the countries of Asia-Pacific region due to the poverty situation, the rural people are bound to destroy forests. Most studies show fuelwood consumption as a major cause of forest degradation which contributes more than 80 per cent of the total removal of forests in tropical Asia. Most of the rural population in South Asia and well over half in Southeast Asia use wood and charcoal as their main, if not only cooking fuel. Situation in South Asia, so far as fuel is concerned, is very crucial.

The expansion of agriculture is one of the important causes of forest destruction linked directly to poverty. Forest area of Thailand declined from more than 40 per cent of the country's total area in 1975 to 29 per cent of the country's total area in 1985. Over the same period, the agriculture area grows by nearly 1.5 per cent a year, from 35 per cent of the country's total area in 1975 to 45 per cent in 1985. During the 1950s and 1960s encroachment of forest lands occurred in most of South Asia. In Bangladesh up to 1989, 76,596 ha. of forest lands have been encroached upon in different areas of the country.

Livestock plays an important role in the economy of the Asian countries. In South Asia farmers depend on tree fodder and forest grazing to feed their livestock for at least part of the year. In India due to continuing pressure on grazing lands, the existing community lands can partly meet the fodder needs. The milk yield is low in these countries due to lack of supply of adequate and good quality fodder. In Nepal women spend hours for getting fodder for livestock. In South East Asia, in parts of Philippines and Java trees are an important source of fodder. Thus limited supply of fodder compared to the high demand

by Dr M A Momin

contributes to forest destruction.

For housing purposes trees are used. Due to the lack of adequate income the poor people of the rural community cannot buy timber in the market. This inability to buy and sell necessity may also contribute to the destruction of forests by the people.

### Non-poor Related Deforestation

Although poor people make reasonable contribution to deforestation in the Asian countries, it is very often over emphasized, as if only poverty is the factor behind deforestation. In fact, there are many other non-poor related factors associated with deforestation in the Asian countries.

Logging is an important factor for forest degradation. Commercial logging is an important aspect. Logging of forests is very much prevalent in South East Asia. Logging required the opening up of forests in order to create access roads. For example, such clearing has been estimated at 14% of the area being exploited in studies carried out in Sabah and the Philippines. Another study in Sarawak showed that the space that was temporarily uncovered and the soil denuded could in total represent up to 40 per cent of the logged area. The same study found that when 26 trees were cut and removed per ha, 33 others were broken or damaged in every ha logged. In South East Asia selective logging damages between one and two thirds of unused species. One third of the logged forest soil is left bare and the heavy logging equipment causes severe soil compaction. According to FAO, between 1988 and 1978 about one million square kilometres of forests (385,000 sq. miles) were leased for tropical timber extraction mainly in South East Asia and Africa. Some 11,000 square miles of tropical forests are converted every year for commercial timber.

Government sponsored organized forms of settlement are found in countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and to some extent in Nepal. Under the transmigrating programme in Indonesia people have been shifted from overpopulated Java, Bali and Madura areas to Sumatra and Kalimantan. In Sri Lanka under the Mahaweli Irrigation project, some 260,000 ha of forest area was converted to agriculture for organized settlement of people. In Nepal, five year re-settlement plan was taken up by the government and on an average 3,000 families were settled during 1973-78. Although sometimes the settlement programmes are undertaken for the interest of the poor, the destructions of forests are done by the government.

In almost every country forest land is destroyed for construction of irrigation and hydroelectric projects. This is observed particularly in India and Sri Lanka. Destructions of

forests for mining are reported from Malaysia and Thailand. Road and highway construction is also done by conversion of forest land. In peninsular Malaysia there are five World Bank aided settlement projects where forest lands are cleared and planted with oil palm and rubber.

Forest fire is a serious factor for forest degradation in the Asian region. Reasons associated with forest fires are: over grazing, cleaning, collection of secondary products, hunting and cropping. Savannization is also an important factor for forest fires. For example, in the Philippines during the period from 1981 to 1985 forest fires destroyed 153,504 ha, representing 84 per cent of the total area deforested for five years. In different parts of Indonesia severe forest fires were observed during the period from mid 1983 to early 1984. The most severely affected area was eastern Kalimantan on the island of Borneo, where approximately 35,000 km<sup>2</sup> (an area larger than Belgium) was burnt in the region of Balikpapan.

Since the rural poor do not have adequate physical, capital assets and technological skill to adopt environment damaging production system, the issue of environmental degradation by the rural poor may also be questioned.

Another aspect of poverty-environmental degradation nexus is the easy access of the rural poor to public domain lands for food, fuel, fodder and fibre items. In the face of what Hardin called the tragedy of the commons the rural poor, who depend to a large extent on CPR (common property resources), have been gradually gaining less access to the source of their livelihood.

The institutional arrangements of CPR for poverty alleviation, which may be called "the other land reform" (Bromley, 1989), is not fully understood and often manipulated in favour of the rich.

### SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

In the context of grim environment of deprivation in the Asian countries, appropriate strategies for poverty alleviation is essential. Economic growth by itself will not automatically alleviate poverty particularly in the short- and medium-term. The development process with high growth strategy can bypass significant sections of the community. Even growth strategy can work to make disadvantaged vulnerable groups worse off. Development strategies should be undertaken specially for the improvement of the living standard of the disadvantaged section of the community. This should also be done by involving them into the productive process so that poverty alleviation strategy also bring contribution to output.

For alleviation of poverty, growth is essential. Existing growth process is also associated with environmental degradation. More air pollution

and global warming are created by more production of steel and autos, production of more newspapers and construction of more houses lead to the felling of more trees. For production of more food, more pesticides should be utilized. Increased output in the petrochemical industry is accompanied by a rise in toxic substance.

Thus economic growth pollutes and damages environment. Development and lack of development (poverty) both can contribute to environmental degradation. In order to protect environment, poverty should be alleviated. For the interest of protection of environment, development process should also pursue in such a manner so that in no way it does destroy or degrade environment. Brundland Commission recognized this situation and said that what is needed is the "Sustainable Development". The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) defined, "Sustainable Development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

Human interventions create threat to life-support systems both locally and globally. Sustainable development must not endanger the natural systems that support life on earth: the atmosphere, the waters, the soils and the living beings. Asia is a region with various types development experiences. It has Japan with most advanced economies in the world. It has South Asia with several poor nations. In between it includes several countries of East Asia, which have industrialized themselves successfully. In South-East Asia some more countries are in the verge of crossing of this threshold. For this reason, preparation of a unique strategy for sustainable development for the whole region will not be a valid one.

Majority of the people of Asia live in the less developed area of the continent. Therefore, a definition of sustainability should be found for the interest of the large majority of the people of the region who share a broadly similar level of economic and technological development.

Because of limited supply of resources in these poor countries, development must be with optimum utilization of resources. Development should be equitable otherwise extreme disparities lead to their own logic of resource destruction. It must be environmentally sound and it must fulfill desire of people with the resources available to them.

*Abridged from a paper presented at the seminar on "Environment and Development" at Rajshahi University.*

*(This is the concluding part of a two-part feature.)*

# Why Only Africans Can Save Africa

by Moira Levy from Cape Town

**A**FRICA faces the choice of becoming a "dinosaur continent," relegated to the history books as the continent that became extinct through years of post-independence decline. Or it may seize the last opportunities left to it to reverse the trend towards economic and social disintegration.

That is the stark outline being presented in the 1990s as most African countries approach their third decade of independence and signs that even modest achievements of the early post-colonial era have been lost. Comparisons with

tion of Africa was the focus of a gathering in Cape Town of the Inter-Action Council, a New York-based group of influential former government leaders.

A core group of 36 past heads of government met for a three-day summit. It included Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, Maria de Lourdes Pintassilgo of Portugal, Lopo Nascimento of Angola and Kamal Hassan of Egypt. Draft proposals will be put to a full session of the council in Shanghai in May.

The accent of the summit, called Bringing Africa Back into the Mainstream of the

put, roughly equivalent to that of Belgium, and accounts for only one per cent of world trade. This has occurred over a period when trade has become the motor of development for other developing countries and regions.

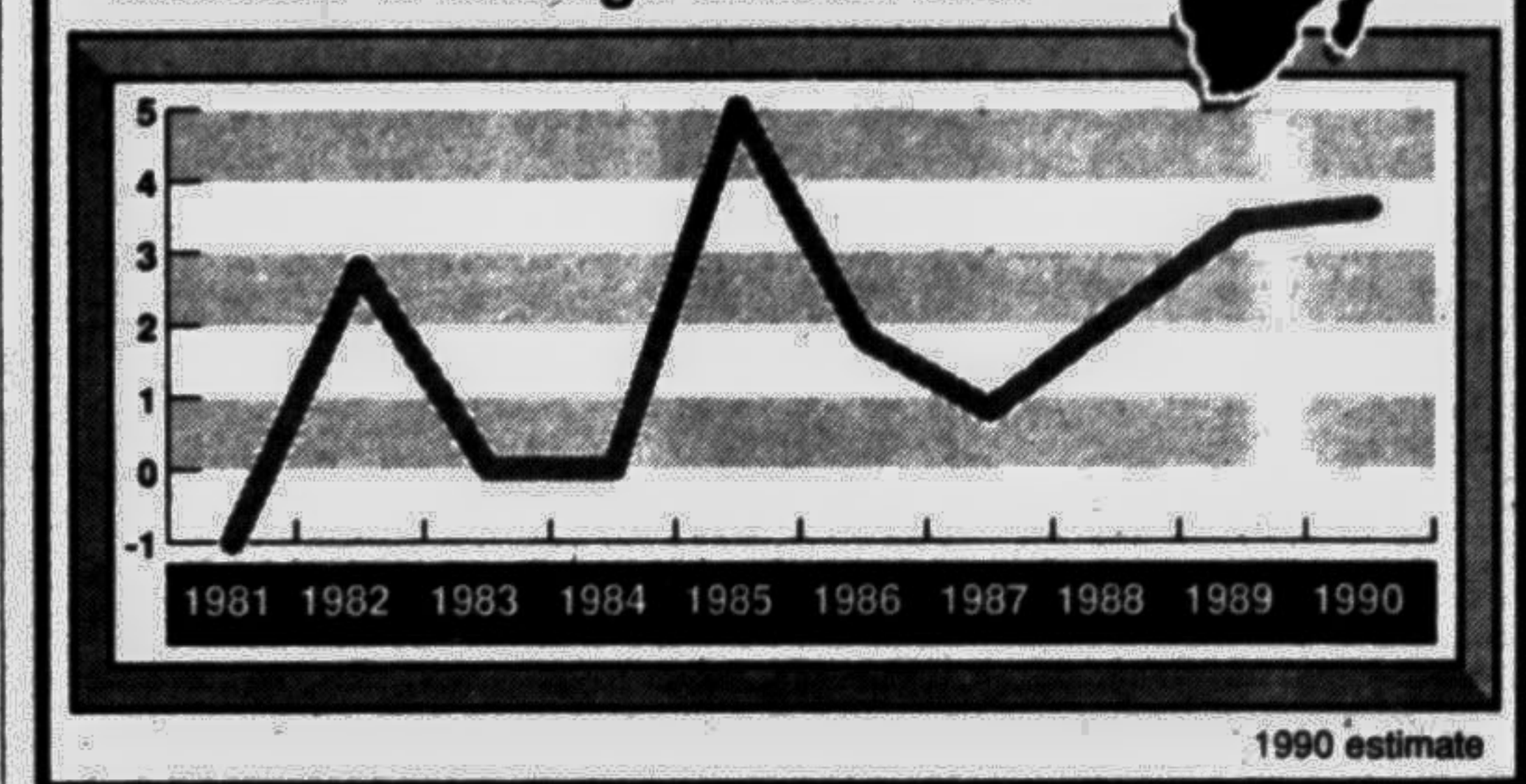
In sub-Saharan Africa in 1985, almost half the population lived below the poverty line, compared to an average of 16 per cent across developing countries.

African countries are not only poor. Their poverty is persistent, even endemic. Compared with other developing countries, growth in

**Three decades after independence most African countries continue to suffer appalling economic conditions. Sixteen of the world's poorest 20 nations are in Africa. Despite its abundant natural resources, the continent has been marginalised in international affairs. African's increasing isolation was the focus of a gathering in Cape Town of the Inter-Action Council, a New York-based group of former leaders including former Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda and former British prime minister Lord Callaghan.**

## Africa's record

### Annual % change of real GDP



other developing regions, most notably Asia, leave Africa staggering paces behind, despite the continent's abundant natural resources.

The world community is becoming fed up with a continent wracked by corruption, civil war and economic mismanagement. International funders and donors are now saying "trade, not aid," and they are demanding evidence of a commitment not only to sound economic policies but also to the principles and practices of democracy.

This growing impatience in world attitudes comes at a time of a shift in international focus on to the struggling democracies of Eastern Europe. The post-Cold War era has brought new demands and challenges for the superpowers, and their interest in Africa is waning.

The increasing marginalisation

of Africa itself has to play in halting its increasing marginalisation. The chairman, former British prime minister Lord Callaghan, said the continent could not bank on a lifeline from the rest of the world: "There can be assistance from outside, but only Africa can save itself. Only Africans can save Africa."

General Oluşgun Obasanjo, who ruled Nigeria from 1976 to 1979, said: "The worst-case scenario is one of Africa being reduced to pestilence, disease and war, of Africa becoming the dinosaur continent that people have to read about in the history books."

He said that for too long African countries had fallen back on the "easy scapegoats" of colonialism and neo-colonialism instead of considering the role one-party rule and state corruption and nepotism had played in the marginalisation of the continent in world affairs.

Said Obasanjo: "What happened was that bad politics led to bad economics which led to a bad social situation and an undesirable climate for investment."

The reasons for the sidelining of the continent are complex and varied — and need to be treated with some caution as statistics are not always readily available and differences between Africa's 50 states must be recognised.

In addition, it needs to be pointed out that a number of social welfare indicators suggest a bottoming out of some of the continent's problems. Africans are living longer, infant mortality has decreased and the ratio of doctors and nurses to the general population has improved.

Since 1965, average life expectancy has increased by one-fifth. For example, in 1960, a man or woman in sub-Saharan Africa could expect to live to about 42 years. Today that average is 51. Similarly, infant mortality rates are down by one-third.

However, researchers also caution that Aids, in effect, has cancelled out further projected improvements in mortality rates, with an estimated 65 per cent of the world's incidence of the disease occurring in Africa, according to World Health Organisation estimates.

Sixteen of the world's poorest 20 nations are in Africa. Trade indicators are even more sobering. Sub-Saharan Africa contributes only 1.5 per cent of world economic out-

put. Africa has notably slow in many countries in the beginning of the 1990s, per capita Gross Domestic Product was "no higher than 20 years ago" and saving and investment rates were the same as they were almost 30 years ago.

Some would argue that despite these pessimistic indicators, shifts in Africa towards multi-party democracy and market-led economies suggest that decades of post-independence marginalisation are beginning to be reversed.

The argument goes that, poverty and underdevelopment notwithstanding, parts of Africa are undergoing a process of democratisation that will integrate it into the international community.

The post-independence trend towards expending the economic role of the state is starting to be reversed, with some countries — notably Ghana, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Benin — introducing liberalisation. Prices are being deregulated, industrial protectionism is being reduced and public enterprises are being privatised or reformed.

In the last 18 months, at least six African countries have held multi-party elections and others have indicated some willingness to do so. Kenya, Zambia, Ghana, Namibia, the Seychelles and Angola have gone to the polls in recent months, with varying degrees of success.

However, Africa has yet to demonstrate its commitment to the principles of democracy: including a free press, separation of the legislative and judiciary powers, freedom of assembly and association, an end to government corruption and the upholding of human rights.

Such a commitment would mean that the allegations of corruption that accompanied the Kenyan election would require the poll to be declared null and void.

Commentators agree that in the final instance the onus lies on Africa to prove its credentials. "The principles of democracy don't belong to the Western world. They are universal," Lord Callaghan said.

"The form, the content and the mechanisms of democracy arise out of the culture of each country. There is no one system or form of democracy that spreads through the world; the form of democracy must be determined by each country depending on its circumstances and the context in which it arises," said Callaghan.

"But to some extent the process of reversing the marginalisation of Africa can be said to have begun already in the sense that there is overall agreement on the continent about the principles that characterise democracy."

# A Place of Hope in a Country at War

by Mark Thomas from Somalia

**S**OMALIS call this small, sandy hamlet LaFoole, the "place of bones," in memory of the thousands of their countrymen killed here in a battle against Italian colonialist forces in the late 1800s.

Today, a more fitting name would be RaJoole, the "place of hope," for that is exactly what Somali physician Hawa Abdi Diblawa has built here for thousands of people caught up in the country's fratricidal civil war.

LaFoole Hospital, located 21 kilometres west of the strife-torn capital of Mogadishu, was founded by Dr Hawa and her husband-in 1985 to help the area's rural poor. But, following the outbreak of conflict in 1991, the hospital and its surrounding grounds were turned into a safe haven for 5,000 displaced people, providing them with life-saving medical services, food and shelter.

The tireless efforts of Hawa, 45, and her Somali staff to ease the suffering of some of Somalia's most needy have received wide recognition. Expatriate aid workers have compared Hawa to Mother Theresa, and both UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali and former US President George Bush praised her work during recent visits.

Leading yet another visitor on a tour of the hospital and the displaced people's makeshift shelters, the petite, gracious Hawa laughs softly when asked if she ever tires of all the attention.

"Yes," she says, "But thankfully the children never do. They love the attention visitors give them, and after what they've been through they deserve it."

As the children that invariably follow her around the



**VICTIMS OF CLAN WARS**  
Somali children are given nutrition biscuits at LaFoole centre.

camp play with the wind-blown tails of her long white lab coat, Hawa explains that she built the hospital at LaFoole because her ancestry is there.

"My family has lived in this area for generations. My grandfather and my grandfathers both died fighting the Italians here. My blood is in

this ground". Hawa studied medicine in the Soviet Union, and then specialised in gynaecology and obstetrics at the University of Mogadishu. She later lectured at the University's medical school and also completed a law degree.

When Hawa and her husband opened the hospital at

**After the so-called Operation Restore Hope, the Americans have started to move out of Somalia. A multinational force under UN supervision is to replace them. While foreigners come and go, many dedicated Somalis are nursing their country back to normalcy. One such person is physician Dr Hawa Abdi Diblawa, who at her hospital near the strife-torn capital Mogadishu, has been treating war injuries and providing food and lodging for displaced families. Gemini News Service reports on Hawa's devotion to her people.**

LaFoole, it was just a few rooms "for those who couldn't afford the hospitals in Mogadishu or were too sick to travel that far," said Hawa.

In 1987, the hospital was expanded to 40 in-patient rooms, an out-patient clinic, an operating theatre and a delivery room. It developed such a reputation that wealthy Mogadishu residents started to come for treatment. The money the hospital received for treating well-off patients subsidised the medical services for the local poor. "No one was turned away," said Hawa.

With the overthrow of President Mohammed Siad Barre in early 1991 and the beginning of inter-clan fighting, many of the hospitals in the capital were closed temporarily.

Mariam Mohammed, a nurse who serves as Dr Hawa's deputy, remembers that for several weeks they treated 10 to 15 people a day for bullet and shrapnel wounds. As food became scarcer, and security in and around Mogadishu continued to deteriorate, Hawa says, "We were overrun with patients...as many as 150 per day."

According to hospital records, between November 1991 and November 1992, Dr Hawa and her staff treated 27,300 patients — 960 for gunshot wounds — and delivered 770 babies.

Displaced families from around the capital began to settle at the hospital. As unrest spread throughout the country, tens of thousands took to the road in search of food and a place to escape the escalating violence.

"They came from all over, from very far away," she said. "Mothers and children just walking down the road, not knowing where they were going. It's hard to talk about that time...there were so many difficult things we were seeing."

In order to feed the several thousand displaced who settled at the hospital, Hawa brought maize, beans, bananas and grapefruit from her family's 120-hectare farm nearby. When that food ran out, she sold her gold jewellery to buy more.

Although the displaced at LaFoole camp came from several different clans, there have been no serious inter-clan squabbles. "We are all brothers and sisters here. We are all one